

Post-it® Fax Note	7671	Date 6/16/98	# of pages 4
THOMAS HARDER		From G GERBNER	
Co/Dat Sam Brownback		Co.	

George Gerbner,
Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunication
Temple University, Philadelphia
Tel/fax 610 642 3061
E-mail: ggerbner@nimbus.temple.edu

Highlights of testimony on the effectiveness of parental advisory labels on music for the Senate Commerce Committee hearing, Sen. Sam Brownback chairing, Tuesday, June 16, 1998

In general, the labeling system is an uninformative scheme that deceives the public and protects industry from parents rather than the other way around.

Sexually explicit and even clearly obscene lyrics are played repeatedly during daytime hours on music television with the occasional correction or deletion of certain key words, easily surmised.

Do lyric warning labels inform parents?

Only a small group of upper middle class parents have the information, motivation, and initiative to supervise their children's music purchases and uses. An even smaller fraction have organized efforts to have local store managers observe and follow the advisories.

Do labels affect consumer behavior?

The evidence is mixed, and contradictory. Record store owners in some localities report even higher sales of labeled music. They say that children are likely to pick up a labeled tape, read the song titles and talk about the "dirty" songs.

Do labels affect retailer behavior?

Retailers report that labeled music sells faster, and sells higher volume. Furthermore, for a large group of parents and children who buy their music from used record stores, there are no labels; the plastic outer wrapping has long been torn off.

In an analysis of the top hits of 1995 and 1996, we found that only 12% of the songs had no tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, crime, violence, or sexual lyrics. Songs about growing up, friendship, social issues,

religion, home life or school without crime, drugs sex or violence made up only 7% of the songs.

Are labeled albums marketed to the group (children) they are supposed to warn?

The six major record companies, all of whom are divisions of large global conglomerates, market their top music over their airwaves to stations known for having a young viewership. The primary marketing tool for popular music is the music video which is made for distribution on a global network of stations.

When played on television, songs with obscene words, and references to violence or drugs in the music are censored in a manner that provokes curiosity (see examples below). Television censorship has neutralized the effect of anti-drug messages in songs by deleting the names of illicit drugs the singers speak against.

Do labels or ratings on sex and violence content offer protection for children?

On the contrary, we have found that they open the door for the implicit promotion of risk-free tobacco and alcohol. For a viewership of 8-12 year olds, Bacardi, Hennessy, Old English, Dom Perignon, Cisco, Tanqueray, Martini and Rossi, Heineken, and Bombay gin are all given clear mention in lyrics, alongside generic references to beer, champagne, cognac, wine, Chardonnay, Martinis, and just "drinks".

A child viewer of music videos will be exposed to vivid images of attractive role models singing about and/or using alcohol every 15 minutes, and tobacco every 30 minutes. This is more than in adult-oriented prime time and daytime-serial drama.

Themes and elements in Contemporary Music

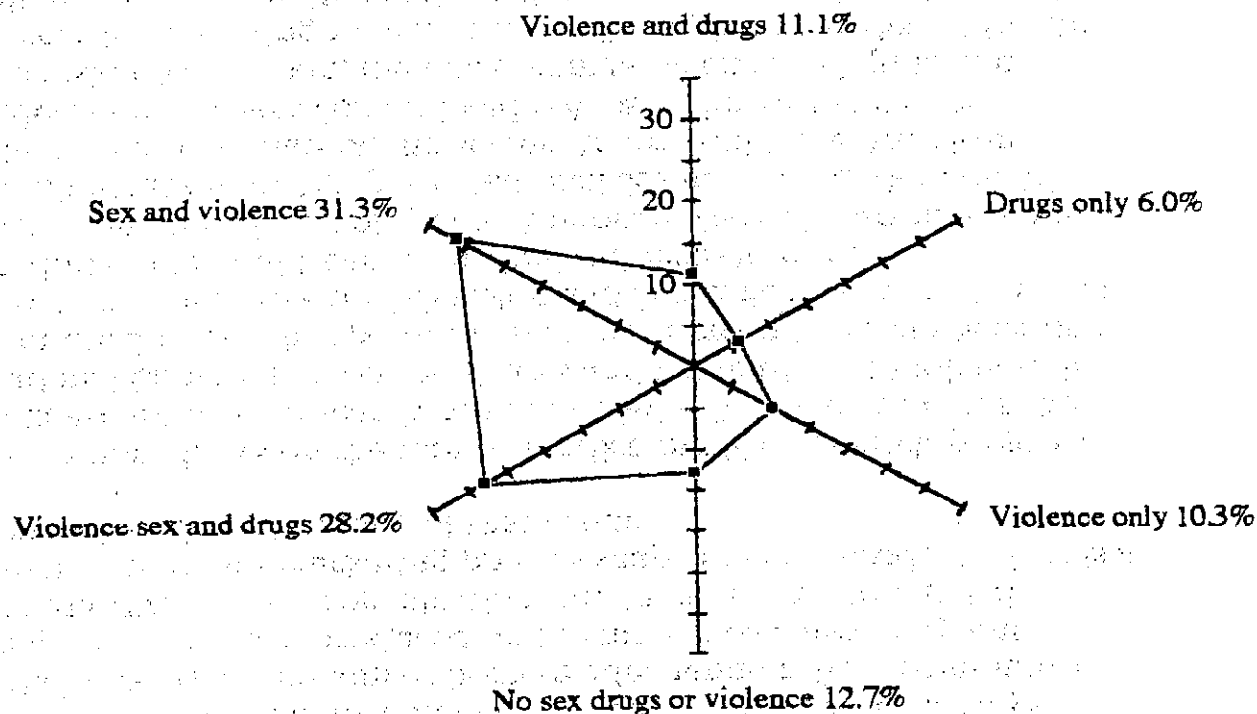


Figure 1. From a content analysis of 262 songs produced and distributed by 6 major record companies and randomly selected independent labels. Percent of total songs with given themes.

Table 1.

Sex, violence, and alcohol tobacco and illicit drugs in music	Portion of TV characters
Violence and drugs	11.1%
Drugs only	6.0%
Violence only	10.3%
No sex drugs or violence	12.7%
Violence sex and drugs	28.2%
Sex and violence	31.3%
Sex and drugs	0.0%
Sex only	0.0%
Total	100%

Samples of music lyrics

"I'll remember the drink that you gave me."
"I like to kick back with a 40 on his lap".
"call up my crew and tell them to bring the brew and some
Hennessey for the beach party"
"Sit back with your six pack"
"Baby you still got the drinks?"
"I like sipping VSOP Hennessey from foam cups".
"Pour wine on me."
"I warm up a room like a bottle of Bacardi".
"Baby down this Mamosa"
"Sipping on Sloe gin."
"If I bought a drink you wouldn't toast,"
"They Tried to slip him a Mickey in his Bombay." (Gin)
"I'm drunk but I'm sober."
"We had a drink, We had a smoke."
"We pop the cork on and give the champagne to the stork that
brought the light to my momma in New York."
"Buy me a drink"
"it ain't nothing but a new day drinking Tanqueray with OJ sip it
slow way down low hey!"
"I need beer and a lot of noise in my ear and a rowdy atmosphere to
even think clear."
"Now that I got me some Seagram's Gin. Everybody got their cup but
they ain't chipped in."
"Later on that day my homey Dr. Dre came through with a gang of
Tanqueray and a fat-ass CENSORED of some bubonic CENSORED that
made me choke. This ain't no joke."